Church fills for panel discussion of gay rights, faith

By PAUL ASAY
THE GAZETTE

More than 1,000 people packed Vanguard Church Monday night for a panel discussion on faith, homosexuality and how the two converge.

Vanguard's main 475-seat auditorium was filled by 6 p.m., 30 minutes before the two-hour discussion started. Attendees who couldn't find seats in the main auditorium watched the debate on closed-circuit television in an adjacent auditorium or in the lobby.

"I just wanted to see what the panelists had to say," said Bob Lang. He believes homosexuality is a sin, but he said, "We all have our vices. It's what we do with them that matters."

Ginny Oman came to support the gay-rights panelists.

"I'm also a mental-health therapist," she said. "I want to see what Focus (on the Family) has to say."

The discussion, sponsored by Vanguard and the evangelical Focus on the Family, sprouted from a pair of demonstrations. In February, the anti-gay Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kan., protested outside Palmer High School, where a gay-straight club is suing for official recognition. Church members were met by hundreds of gay-rights protesters. Sunday, the gay Christian group Soulforce will picket at Focus on the Family's Colorado Springs headquarters.

Focus, an opponent of same-sex marriage, supplied three panel participants: Glenn Stanton, Melissa Fryrear and Joe Dallas. The other three — the Rev. Benjamin Broadbent of First Congregational Church-United Church of Christ; Ginger Morgan, associate pastor at Colorado College; and Ryan Acker, interim director for the Pikes Peak Gay and Lesbian Community Center — are gay-rights leaders.

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years later, and the property remained in the name of Alma until her death three years ago, at age 83.

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